

6: Sauer--130

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(1785-94) 1802

Yakut

116, 291, 171, 515

"Their dress is much more complete than that of the Tungoose; and the more wealthy among them wear a cloth coat lined and trimmed with fur, with tight and well made pantaloons; but their boots are ill shapen. The women dress very like the Tungoose, but are in general not so clean or sprightly."

The Yakuts

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particular by the poorer people who had no cattle, although it was also a secondary diet for the wealthier groups in the population. In the summer, people used to eat fresh fish boiled in water or slightly fried (carp and other small fish), on spikes or in a frying pan (the scales were removed but the innards were left untouched). A great deal of fish was stocked up for the winter, pickled in bark-lined pits; the acidified and half-rotten fish—*syma*—was then frozen and used to make *butugas* as a substitute for milk tar. The more valuable types of fish, particularly sterlet, white salmon, and whitefish of various types, were consumed in the raw, frozen form.

With rare exceptions, meat was eaten only in the wealthier households. Most highly valued was horsemeat, but even among the rich it was not served too often. Beef was eaten more frequently. The meat of various other animals, especially in the northern hunting regions, was also eaten. It was usually boiled (though attempts were made not to overcook it), and sometimes roasted in the old manner on wooden spikes. Fat was specially highly valued. The carcasses of slaughtered cattle were kept for the winter in frozen form. The Yakuts did not eat certain types of wild animals and birds—beasts of prey, sea gulls, ravens, cuckoos and owls—and they refused to eat the brains of domestic animals. During the 19th century, under Russian influence, bread began to be eaten and later salt, sugar and tea became part of the diet of the Yakuts. Dealers brought in vodka to the *ulusy*.

Hygiene

The living conditions of the Yakuts before the Revolution were extremely unhygienic. As a result of the filth, overcrowding and stagnant air in the yurt with its earthen floor and cattle-shed right next door conditions were completely abnormal. Furthermore, the Yakuts, particularly in winter, rarely washed themselves, and the washing of clothes was practically unknown.

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that there were frequent epidemics. Skin diseases were particularly rampant, and mange, ringworm, ulcers, and so on were due to the permanent contamination of the skin. Eye diseases (trachoma, etc.) were very common, particularly among the older people, a large number of whom lost their sight. According to the 1915 census, there were 110 blind people per 10,000 Yakuts. True leprosy existed in some of the damp, marshy regions; isolation shelters for lepers were arranged in out of the way spots. Tuberculosis was quite common.

Nervous disorders were widespread in the northern regions of Yakutiya, particularly among women, which was due to the difficult living conditions, exhausting work, and to a number of women's diseases, etc. The nervous disorders took such forms as Arctic hysteria, the so-called *menerik*, which is something like epilepsy; the sick woman throws a fit during which she shouts and raves until she falls asleep exhausted. Another, similar nervous disorder was *aypax*; the symptoms are an unconscious, involuntary imitation of anything which frightens or astonishes the sufferer.

The Yakuts had no rational method of treating these ailments. They often used primitive domestic cures such as cauterizing, licking the pus from sores and so on. It was usual during sickness to resort to quack doctors and shamans.

Social Structure

The social structure of the Yakuts, as it had developed by the time of the October Revolution, was a peculiar mishmash of complex forms of

342 glass, tambours (extra doors with an air lock in between) and zavalinkas (mounds of earth around the house). A common practice is to ice over the house for the winter with a mixture of snow and water. Double ceilings, double floors, horizontal flues and shutters are still used, although rather rarely. The brick or tile stove is sometimes combined with the traditional Yakut fireplace. In many houses there is an extra iron stove in addition to the brick stove.

35 The internal appearance of dwellings has also changed. The furniture known before to the Yakuts (tables, stools and benches) has become less massive and more varied. We now find bookshelves, chairs, small dressing-tables and mirrors. Factory-made crockery and utensils are encountered in every home. Clocks (including alarm clocks), writing materials, and books have become common, and phonographs are also sometimes found. In most houses the walls are adorned with posters, pictures of Communist Party leaders, photographs, bookshelves, and over the bed there is usually a rug made of skin from the reindeer's head, bead-embroidered saddlecloths, or else the walls are covered with cloth. The windows have curtains.

[177] Tremendous changes have taken place in the way of life of the Yakuts.
[377] Many collective farms now have electricity and radio. Clean clothes,
[207] hot baths, and attention to their personal appearance are typical of most of
[515] the collective-farm members. There has been a change in interests, habits
[54] and way of life. The outlook of the population has broadened. Books can now be found in every house. In the settlements people enjoy movies, and attend lectures and discussions in the reading rooms. Young people take part in ski-races, chess and other sporting events. Amateur song and dance groups in the clubs are usually of interest to the whole settlement. The families are no longer isolated and no longer keep to themselves.

524 A typical innovation for city children is toys, such as figures of horses and cows, rubber dolls, rattles, clockwork trucks, and so on. In addition to these, we commonly find delicately carved wooden animals and tiny bows and arrows. In the schools and boarding facilities children amuse themselves with the most popular table games. In the spring and summer they play various games, including hide-and-seek and blind man's-buff.

262 A great deal has changed in the Yakut diet, as well.

It should be remembered that before the Revolution Yakutiya was a country of chronic famine. Most of the Yakut population suffered from starvation every year, particularly at the end of the winter and in spring. Bread has now become a normal food not only in the southern but also in the northern areas. Groats and macaroni are now part of the staple diet. The consumption of vegetables and potatoes has also considerably increased.

242 In many regions the collective farms grow cucumbers, radishes, cabbages, onions and beets. Vegetables are imported in the dehydrated form.

443 Everywhere the population is amply provided with tea, sugar, and tobacco.

262 There are bakeries at trading points in most settlements. Meat and fish are consumed by the Yakuts in large quantities, particularly in the northern regions, where they are the staple diet. In the southern regions an important part of the diet is dairy products. On account of the overall improvement in the living standards of the people, sapwood is no longer consumed

177 as food. Nor do they eat pickled fish any more. Local traditions are still retained in the cooking of dairy products, meat and fish. In the northern regions meat is commonly undercooked. Milk is made into some curious dishes such as suorat, khayakh, chokhoon, *soyur* and so forth. In a number of regions reindeer gristle is still eaten in the raw state as a delicacy, and so are the liver and bone marrow of this animal. Many families eat freshly